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Do Human Beings Have
Free Will?

A Debate

Affirmative:
Professor George Burman
Foster

Negative:
Clarence Darrow (Defender
of Evolution Theory, and
now defender of the error
that human beings do not
have free will)

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DO HUMAN BEINGS HAVE FREE WILL?

PROFESSOR GEORGE BURMAN FOSTER'S FIRST SPEECH

PROFESSOR FOSTER: This is indeed an old subject. Many have thought all the juice has been squeezed out of it and that there is no more blood in this turnip. I think there is blood in it—lots of it. I am going to present the turnip and I am going to let Mr. Darrow squeeze the blood out of it. It is also thought that it is

an unimportant subject. There is one reason why that might be true. It is that whether you are determinists or libertarians all of you act pretty much the same way. And you forget about it. You eat and drink and sleep and work and love and get mad and get glad, no matter which way this thing is. So, that being the case, it might seem to be unimportant, but for all that the problem has persisted through the centuries and it must be fundamental; like Banquo's ghost, "It will not down." The statement of it

solved is functionally important in maturing the human spirit. If that be true we should be willing to accept the situation in the particular to which I have referred. So Mr. Darrow and I are here again today to break our teeth upon this old file—or, if Mr. Darrow's teeth are strong enough, he might break the file on his teeth. I do not quite feel that I can do it myself. The most that I can do in the time at my disposal, is to point out the means and import of this great controversy.

What do we mean by

of the difficulty which I have to face. Darrow cannot escape it either. But the upshot is that our debate is concerned not with the question, Is the Will Free, but, Is Man Free? Is the Self Free?—or, if you will allow a word, characterized by mystery and depth, Is Personality Free? I am practically and theoretically interested in such a question as that. It is rather interesting that today we should debate a question of freedom in a world where only yesterday the earth was drenched with blood and the sky

choked with storm, in what many called an effort to achieve freedom. For, if man is not free, what worth is it to have society free, or government free, or a race free, or an earth free? This points to another item that I wish to be particularly understood—inasmuch as I am urging that freedom is not a property of the will, something already there, as extension or some property of matter.

I have to indicate to you why this is so. The reason is that freedom—if I make out a case for its existence—is not an endowment; it is an

MR. CLARENCE DARROW'S FIRST SPEECH

MR. DARROW: The professor always saves me some time and trouble in these discussions. He is so honest that he generally puts my side of it about as well as he does his own, and I think a little better. Now, I am at a loss to know whether he believes in free will or not. Of course he and I could discuss with you for a long while the question of what is the Will and what is Freedom. It would take several debates

The action is settled. The will is only a question of how he feels before he dives in, that is all. If you can call the will force, as so many philosophers do, then I cannot see that it means anything much as applied to this subject. The professor is a theologian, or was, and I practice law.

To us it has some practical meaning. To the theologian it means that a man is going to hell because he purposely chooses to do the evil when he could just as well have done the right. That is out of his free choice, as an

at home this afternoon, as the Professor says, or come here and go to sleep.

I know we all have an illusion of freedom. That is not the only illusion we have. We are filled with them, most of which never materialize and never could materialize. We have a feeling of freedom, a feeling of choice, but it is simply one of those illusions—one of the countless illusions that rule life, that govern us, keep us alive without which we would die and get through with it, for there would be nothing to live for. But the question of

chance to say whether he will be born or not, or whether he will die or not.

The great events of life are absolutely beyond his control. He has not even much to say about getting married. Man—I am speaking of. If man is like the rest of the universe, I suppose there can be little question about this. It is only when the theologian comes along and endows man with a soul that lives forever and has no relation to anything else hut God and the Devil, as the case may be, then is the only time we get into trouble

and go south in the winter? I suppose those geese, just like the rest of us, think they do it because they want to. But they do not. They cannot help it. If they could, some geese would fly north in the winter time, although nobody knows how they find out they ought to fly north in the summer time. And they fly south in the winter time in accordance with a fixed, immutable law that even geese cannot control. Why doesn't the deer fight instead of run? You would think he would fight once in a while. And why doesn't

life is alike. All animal life is born from a single cell; one cell is built upon another, according to the pattern of the cell, not according to the will of the individual animal. If it was built according to the pattern of the individual animal, a great many of us would look different from the way we do.

It is all built from the original pattern. The life of man is no different from any other animal except perhaps a little more complex, possibly a little higher developed. We say higher because we make

something like poetry, but he cannot string words together like poetry. Can you make an artist from the germ for a blacksmith?

All these things are born first of all; they are not made. All of it is back in the original egg, from which the life came, and all the life developed according to the pattern and there is no power to change it. It is perfectly plain to everyone that no man has anything whatever to do with his origin. It is perfectly plain that in the big things of life he has nothing to say. Where he was born, what

alike.

It must be admitted that man has nothing to do with his heredity. What has he then to do with his environment? For the first eight or ten years of his life, at least, when all of his most lasting impressions are formed, it is perfectly plain that he has nothing to do with this environment, no more than with his heredity. He had no chance to choose his parents. He had no chance to choose his early nurturing. He had no chance to place himself in an environment that was easy, where he could

First on the scales, which he did not make, and nature or law provides no way for testing these scales so he will know whether they are correct. All we know is that they are not correct, that no two weigh alike. He uses these imperfect scales which came to him—nobody knows how, excepting that he did not make them—that come to him from all of the dead that are gone, and are fixed. Then he dumps into these scales the different reasons for this and for that.

And the reasons depend

give the greatest satisfaction. The scales may be different and the vision may be different.

Take a simple question. Two men go down the street. They both see a blind man begging. One person gives him money, the other passes him by. Is one a selfish man and the other an unselfish man? Nothing of the sort. Each acts from the same motive. Each acted to satisfy himself. Each acted to ease himself. If the man who gave money could have felt better had he kept it, he would have kept it. The

act from any other.

We all find comfort in our various philosophies of life, and our various religions. Some get it by being Catholics and some Methodists; some by being Christian Scientists; while some do not get it. But, all of us act along the same lines. We cannot help it. Let me put another thought to you.

There is nobody who believes in free will. Even the ignorant people do not believe in it, let alone a wise man like the professor. All society and all life is formed on a consciousness that

PROFESSOR FOSTER'S SECOND SPEECH

PROFESSOR FOSTER: My friend, Mr. Darrow, is certainly a hard man to manage. Not because what he says is true, or because it is not true, but only seems to be and nonsense has one advantage over sense, you can't refute it. Also because it is suffused with such a delightful humor with which he sugar coats this ungodly pill that he insinuates down our all-too-gullible throats. The humor is something to

all these facts and treat the classes instead of his particular instances, and in doing so meet the issue.

But before doing so, I want you to see the series of thoughts or conceptions into which all this anti-freedom talk articulates. Mr. Darrow, like myself, has rather a consistent theory of the world. To be sure, like myself, he does not practice his theories. He could not; he would not be here today if he did; he would be in the lake. But what is the string of things that should go together as he thinks, and

what is that other string of things that should go together as I think?

Well, you are more interested in him, so I will give you his. This is the way the thing runs on.

Monism, by which is meant there is only one thing in the universe, only one kind of thing, and that this was always there, that what was not always there, was never there but only seems to be— eternalism to the negation of temporalism.

Then follows determinism, about which I will say a word of

explanation. We used to speak of necessitarianism. It is of two kinds, Fore-ordination, if you think that God fixed what was to be, or Fate, if you think that nature or circumstances fixed what is to be.

Mr. Darrow has tried to make out a case for both Fore-ordination and Fate this afternoon, the two together fixing things and so they are pretty well fixed!

Now, under the promptings of Hume and Jonathan Edwards, John Stuart Mill changed the

terminology from
Necessitarianism to
Determinism, which is
better. And William James
pointed out that
Determinism is of two
kinds: Hard Determinism
and Soft Determinism.

Determinism is hard if
you hold that it is
circumstances or, as Mr.
Darrow would say,
environment, that
determines you.
Determinism is soft if you
hold that it is your
character which is so fixed
that it determines you.
Thus you see from Monism
consistently comes

the world of morals, Monism, Determinism and Pessimism carry with them what such a man as Mr. Darrow would call Hedonism in Ethics. That is, that the causes and motives of our actions is pleasure, and that man lives for pleasure.

As against one of our own poets who said:

*Not enjoyment and not
sorrow is our
destined end and
way,
But to live that each
tomorrow finds us
further than today.*

As against all this, I am rather inclined to pluralism. I hold that plurality, diversity, multiplicity, are as original in this universe as unity is. There would not be any unity if there was not something to unify. And, if I am to make a choice, choose the concrete particularities, diversities, multiplicities, as the real, rather than the unity. I am reminded of a story that I now and then tell my class- of an old monk. I will tell it to you.

There was a time in the

Then, I pass from pluralism to freedom as Darrow passes from monism to determinism. For, I affirm a relative independence to these separate existences. They are not fated by antecedent unity that forces them to be as they are. They are just as original as the unity is. I do not deny unity, but unity is an achievement. I do not deny continuity, I affirm discontinuity, I mean creativity, novelty, uniqueness.

The question is not whether we are determined at all or not. We are. And

A man does not always act that he may avoid pain and have pleasure. A man does not always choose to do what from the point of view of any proper use of the word is a selfish thing. But there is an altruistic instinct. The very issue before this planet today is whether there is only a brute upthrust in evolution, whether brute force and selfishness shall alone determine the destiny of man and the fate of the earth, or whether to this is added an ethical process of which love is the inner force. That is the ultimate,

decided once again whether a nation so conceived shall survive or not; we were in a struggle which called us to declare whether we will be influenced by our own ease and comfort and pleasure and let the blood-bought treasure of freedom perish from our hands, or whether by our own treasure and blood and sacrifice, we shall, at any cost, pass on to the future the treasure of freedom which has been purchased us by the fathers that are gone. That was our issue. So that as a fact, unless we abuse the words conscience and duty and

altruism and make them mean what they do not mean, we are bound to admit that the real, inner, spiritual dynamic of this great struggle was as to whether there shall be some place for the altruistic impulses and ideals of humanity to exercise themselves in the world. As man struggles on into the region of the spirit and of will, he may leave behind him the agony of the past, and mount through a clearer air into a wider world beneath serener skies. This shall be not a monistic tyrannical

universe, but a pluralistic democratic universe!

So, you see, another kind of man from Mr. Darrow will stand for pluralism, freedom, moral idealism, activism, instead of that former string of things. Now, I stand for the latter sort of thing. We cannot give up one thought without giving up all. And it is the same sort of thing in the other series of beliefs. We are isolating today just one of these items to which we are drawing special attention. That is the idea of freedom. In every debate, there should be

there ever been in the history of the human race an act of freedom? Are there acts of freedom on the part of any of us? That is the question. Were it a question of the extent of freedom, Mr. Darrow could say that I belong to a world without my choice, and a race without my choice, and parents without my choice, and so on. He could say that, as he does practically say, I am pushed into the world, pushed through it and pushed out of it, and that is all there is to it. As against all that pushing, I want to know if

do.

I said I thought his pell-mell of stuff with which he pummeled us could be classified. His first point is the triviality of man. Much that he said can come under that head—the triviality and transitoriness of man. I have got an instinctive and inveterate aversion to that proposition. I am rather glad to say so. How does he prove the triviality of man? He does it in two ways. The first way he classifies man with the animals—says he is just an animal. Well, I admit that. But, there are

organizing a society to make men do stunts? Did you ever? So, there is a difference, a great difference. It is an old trick to lower the dignity of man by exalting the dignity of animals. That is Darrow's trick.

Then, secondly, he proceeds further, and he puts men and animals into the class of things, of nature. Man is like a wooden Indian, Darrow said. As a question of fact, is he? The Indian does not debate with me, and Darrow does! The wooden Indian does not smoke. I

do. The wooden Indian does not enter into the wet and dry controversy. I do. There is a difference. So, he goes on and lowers man still farther and makes him all the more trivial by putting him in along with nature. Now, a tree cannot go from Hyde Park to Washington Park. I can. An animal cannot read *The Critique of Pure Reason*. I can. You scatter an alphabet out-doors here along the street. Nature cannot pick them up and put them together into Homer's *Illiad*. Homer could. There is a difference.

Who knows to the contrary? Think how much I would have to know, to know the contrary! So, I do not accept his argument on trivialities. There is another possibility.

But then Darrow has another point, namely, the old argument from causation. That is, the universality and inviolability of cause. Man is an effect of causes, he says. I wonder if he never goes on and asks the question whether that is a half-truth and whether or not man, of all the realities of the universe, is the only

what it is to be in the untrodden years of its future existence.

So, the half-truth of Darrow's Determinism must allow this other truth on account of which the proposition seems to be indeed a half-truth.

The question of causation is an interesting one. I want to say two or three things about it. The real problem of freedom, you understand, is whether there is an excess of possibilities over actualities, or whether along with the actuality-world there is also

would have to know, to know this. I wish to point out to you, and I ask your particular attention for a moment, that the determinist's assertion transcends the competency of science. All that science can do is to deal with matters of fact. All that science can do is to pass from fact to fact; with facts, determine what other facts exist. It is not within the competency of science to pass from actuality to possibility, from facts to non-facts—from matters of fact to fact-lessness. Science simply deals with

the actuality-world and it neither affirms nor denies the existence of the possibility-world.

But, therefore, if there are other considerations which warrant mention to assert the possibility-world, science allows me to do so. The contention of the man who, like myself, has faith in freedom is that there are other considerations. I have already referred to some of them, namely, the universality and the dignity and the importance of our judgment, of regard and approval of censure and condemnation, of right and

wrong, and the like. Our living requires the assumption of a possibility-world. Science does not exclude the postulate that there may be such a world. Science is the explanation, explicit and demonstrated, of all facts that are non-values. The opposites of science are two things, one is faith and the other is an estimate of values. Faith is an explicit disobedience of the maxim,—I put it gravely,—that whatever is asserted as true should be perceived or demonstrated. To have faith is to assert what lacks proof. Faith is

the assertion of an unfounded conviction. I put it briefly, but truly, to you. I repeat, faith is the assertion of an unfounded conviction for no other reason than the value of that conviction in the high and holy business of human living. But neither does science assert values, as our moral and esthetic convictions do.

There are two sets of judgments. Two plus two is four. Water comes from hydrogen and oxygen. It is a mile from here to the Coliseum. Those are science judgments. Those

are judgments of fact. Now, there is another kind of judgment. He ought to be a better man. He could be a better man. The sunset is beautiful. His cause is noble. Truth is better than lying. Courage is better than cowardice. God is holy and ought to be worshiped. That is another set of propositions. Those are propositions of life. Those are judgments of faith and estimates of values. You cannot establish by coercive demonstration a single one of them. And yet our daily life is lived upon the basis of unfounded

convictions in this way.

There is not anything done in the daily round by any of us that has not been done upon the basis of convictions that are undemonstrable from the point of view of coercive proof. Freedom belongs to this class. Freedom is unprovable, but indispensable. Paradoxical as it may seem, the proof of freedom could only be made on a basis which would exclude freedom. The rational justification of your faith in freedom is that you cannot live without it. Freedom is

notion of causation.

But the other consideration is the wrong valuation which the Determinist puts upon cause, law, science. All this rigid mechanical determination is not actual fact, but a mere postulate of the physical sciences. Law? Law is not an ontological dogma, it is a symbolic formula of explanation. Science? Science is but our intellectual technique of purposive action. All these are but tools of man's toil. They are servants of man, by man, for man; not his master. They are not a

buoyant. Moral tasks can be carried on and fulfilled with zest and exhilaration. Man is not a fool when he has faith in the final balance of the best. The world is such that man can bend it to beat the worst and serve the best. But if, as Mr. Darrow seems to think, this world is only a machine, mindless and merciless, then the life of instinct would be all, then the enthusiast for a far-off hope, for an endlessly progressive humanity, for a profound and logical love of life, would be cast off from the land of the living;

then the martyr plays the fool; then it is to saints and sages that the world has lied.

MR. DARROWS SECOND SPEECH

MR. DARROW: Professor Foster would be by all odds the greatest philosopher that I know anything about, if he had not been first educated in a theological cemetery. He is always lapsing, and when he lapses, why, he lapses.

Now, let us see. I did not claim for a minute that

science is sure; that it has found the ultimate. It has not. Because science furnishes no proof is no reason why a thing should be accepted as true.

PROF. FOSTER: It Is.

MR. DARROW: The Professor says "It is."

Then of course, any man may believe anything that will help him.

PROF. FOSTER: Surely.

MR. DARROW: It would help me to believe that I had a million dollars in the bank. But I cannot. I am not fool enough. It might help the Professor to believe that he is to be

transported in a chariot of fire to a place where he can sit on a damp cloud through all eternity and play a harp.

PROF. FOSTER: Not that bad; I don't fancy that job.

MR. DARROW: But, can he believe it? If he is foolish enough to believe it, all right, I do not find any fault with him. I do not know what it is to have faith without some foundation of fact. I think nobody else knows even the person who believes that he is going to be transported immediately to Heaven when he is dead. He has a foundation of fact,

his grandmother told him so, and the preacher told him so. He is not believing without evidence, it is mighty poor evidence, but it is evidence.

The human mind cannot believe anything without evidence. Even if you say you believe it because you need to, that is something; it isn't much. You may be like the, ostrich, put your head into the sand, to get rid of unpleasant facts, and think you are safe. The ostrich is the original Christian Scientist—he gets rid of fear by denying unpleasant thoughts.

The Professor surely does not mean all he said. The difference between him and me is he doesn't mean all he said and I mean more. That was some panegyric that he uttered on duty. But it does not do for people who want to be intelligent to just shut their eyes. What is duty, anyway? Is there any reason why you should not ask yourself a simple question like that?

Some people think it is their duty to go to mass. Some think it is their duty to stay away. Some think it is their duty not to eat meat on Friday and some not to

Now, absolutely, there is no question about this. I do not need to make an argument about it. All you need to do is to think about it just a little. The professor knows better. He did not think what he was saying. I know how a man's mind goes. He set his in motion, revolving, philosophically and wisely, and all of a sudden a cog slips and he ran into one of his old sermons. I think by the Professor's silence he has admitted that animals have no free will, or not much to speak of.

PROF. FOSTER: That is

We have a right to use such scientific knowledge as we have. Is not man an animal? He says, yes. But then he says something that certainly science will not bear out, that man is a different animal from any other, that he is endowed with reason, I suppose nobility of character, although we are not working at it very hard, and a few other things. So far as nobility of character is concerned—if you call duty noble—which I would not, exactly, the animal has got it all over us.

If you count gratitude and

An ape has a brain half as big as a man's, with the same weight of body. Of course, a man does not act like he had twice as much, but he has twice as large a brain, anyway. And that an ape uses it, cannot be questioned.

Every faculty of man is in the other animals. They can learn. But, they cannot learn as much. Of course, they could not read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Thank God! Nor could they understand Butler's "Analogy." Nobody else does! But, they can reason. They can reason

An effect standing up in the universe without having been caused by anything? That is beyond the realm of reason; that is in the realm of faith, and he has got me when he comes to faith—I cannot follow him. Do not cause and effect go hand in hand through everything in Nature? And through every act of life? There are many things that we do not understand, of course, but that is no reason why we should close our eyes to the things we do understand. It will not do to say that the patient labor of scientists to arrive at facts that can be

true. I have thought a good deal about that question. I think I am fairly sure of some parts of it, but, to be sure of these things is—well, you have to be pretty wise or pretty foolish, and I am far too intelligent to be sure and not wise enough nor silly enough to be sure.

As a matter of fact, the will to live permeates the whole universe. We struggle for life. And, pleasure is part of life. It is a life-giving thing.

Pain brings death. And the struggle for pleasure is, almost instinctive and

probably is instinctive.

The professor says we often choose the hard things. True, we do. I have been to a dentist to have my tooth pulled, and it is painful. Why did I do it? Because I would get more pain if I did not have it pulled. That is all. We have to undergo the hard thing if it relieves or will prevent suffering or give future pleasure. We do it instinctively, we act from instinct and feeling. These things preserve life. And what we call duty, and what we call conscience, often lead us to do the things

thing that reaches us, and until it reaches us we do not feel it. The professor says the pain and pleasure theory will not work. I am not quite sure about it. To my mind it is the most reasonable of all of them. But, he says—he quotes a little piece of a poem—what was that? “Not enjoyment and not pleasure, is our destined”— so on and so on. “But to act that each tomorrow finds him further than today.” That is Longfellow. He was not much of a philosopher, nor much of a poet, either. Is there any philosophy in

God was looking out for us. And now we say we did it and that what we do— so large a number of accidents that a man cannot even consider them — that we do it of our own free will! it is the result of all the past. All of Nature has had a share. Aren't we small? What is man, anyhow? What part of the universe? What part of earth, let alone the universe? But, what part of the universe is his brief span of years, measured by eternity?

That is the reason the people who have faith to believe what they want to

did happen. Well, how? If it could happen some other way, why didn't it happen some other way? The fact that it happened this way shows that it could not have happened any other way!

This world and all life is a chain of cause and effect, the effect perhaps in turn becoming another cause. No man can go back into his own life; no man can imagine anything in his own life or in any other persons that came there without a cause. We are mixed with the universe; we are a part of all that is, and to say that there is any

